Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand four hundred and forty-third plenary meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 20 January 2018, at 10.05 a.m.

President: Ms. Veronika Bard ..... (Sweden)

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The President: I call to order the 1443rd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, Mr. Møller, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to start the meeting today with a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Gennadiy Gatilov, who has assumed his responsibilities as Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation in Geneva. On behalf of my own Government and on behalf of the Conference I would like to take this opportunity to assure him of our full cooperation and support in his new assignment.

Please allow me at this stage to make a statement in my capacity as President of the Conference on Disarmament.

First, let me congratulate my predecessor in this chair, His Excellency Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha of Sri Lanka and his team, who did such an outstanding job as this year's first President of the Conference on Disarmament. Ambassador Aryasinha successfully guided us towards the adoption of the decision establishing the five subsidiary bodies on the agenda items of the Conference. The decision sends a message to the Conference on Disarmament to work on identifying areas of commonalities, deepening discussions and considering effective measures. While some had hoped for more, last week's decision was a step in the right direction. It is now up to us, the members of the Conference on Disarmament, to build on this progress.

We got off to a good start by adopting the decision. Let us not lose the momentum. It is my intention to begin consultations immediately on the appointment of the coordinators of the subsidiary bodies, or working groups. I am fully aware of the sensitivities of the different issues and will strive to present to you a list of coordinators that will represent the wealth of experience and wisdom that is represented in the Conference on Disarmament with full respect for equitable regional representation. I do not wish to present you with false expectations of a quick solution, although I realize that speed is of great relevance in starting the operation of the working groups.

I also realize that we need to get it right from the start. I will, therefore, present the candidates for the posts of coordinators when we can be sure that they will be accepted by the Conference on Disarmament. I intend to consult widely on this matter. Once we have the coordinators in place, together with them I will establish a schedule of work for this year's session of the Conference that will be presented to you for your consideration.

I shall now turn to the issue that has been the prevailing theme in the Conference on Disarmament for many years: the programme of work. My delegation has been listening very carefully to the views expressed by delegations on this subject not only in the past few weeks but over a long period of time. We note the substantial differences in views on what a programme of work is, or what it should be. In this context it is worth recalling that the Conference on Disarmament in the 1980s and 1990s was producing a considerable amount of substantive work, other than negotiations. Before actual negotiations began, the Conference on Disarmament was spending a great deal of time on preparatory work. Why not do that today? That is one view.

Another view is that a programme of work must contain a negotiating mandate or several negotiating mandates, right from the start. I do not believe that there is a magical solution reconciling these two perspectives. Many options have been tried and failed. I do, however, believe that the road on which we are now embarking, on the basis of the recently adopted decision, could lead us to an agreement on a programme of work. When such a decision can be adopted is up to the membership of the Conference on Disarmament.

Colleagues, my first priority again will be to operationalize the decision of the establishment of the subsidiary bodies. I will keep you informed of the progress made in these consultations. In parallel, I will consult widely on finding a way to present a programme of work that would meet with consensus. I have, however, no intention of presenting a draft programme of work that we know beforehand will not meet with agreement in this room. We need to create a climate more conducive to productive deliberations leading to negotiations on disarmament instruments. Let us be ambitious in our work, but also realistic about what can be achieved in the short term. The goal should

be clear to all of us: to restore the role of the Conference on Disarmament for which it was originally created – the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community.

I now wish to invite you, dear colleagues, to present your views on the recently adopted decision and on its implementation. On my list of speakers, I have the Russian Federation. I give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation): (*spoke in Russian*) Madam President, Secretary-General, dear colleagues, it is a great pleasure for me to be able to take the floor in this plenary meeting of the 2018 Conference on Disarmament, a unique and authoritative international security forum, which has contributed significantly to the international community, and which has a rich past and a complex present.

Although I had the honour to address last year's Conference participants during the high-level segment, this is the first time that I have participated as Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the Conference on Disarmament. I have been following developments closely, and the steps taken both here in Geneva and at the General Assembly to prepare for the resumption of the Conference's substantive work. This has been greatly assisted by the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres, the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Møller, and the Conference secretariat.

It is encouraging that participants in this forum continue actively to seek ways of strengthening the Conference's capacity. In this regard, I would particularly like to highlight the consistent and tireless efforts of former President, Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha of Sri Lanka. Those efforts were not in vain and, last week, Conference participants took the decision to establish subsidiary bodies to look deeper into items on the Conference agenda with a view to resuming negotiations. This shows that together, through mutual concessions and a degree of flexibility, delegations are able to reach a compromise.

Putting this decision into practice has already become the responsibility of the Swedish presidency. In this regard, I would like to congratulate Ambassador Veronika Bard on taking up this prestigious post, and to wish her and her colleagues every success. Please be assured of the Russian delegation's constructive attitude. We hope that you will be able to solve the technical issues, primarily regarding the appointment of coordinators for the subsidiary bodies, without delay, so that practical substantive work can begin as soon as possible. The Russian delegation remains committed to taking an active role in all discussions.

In this regard, we would anticipate that, with your active cooperation, the determined search for optimal solutions will continue, to ensure a well-balanced programme of work for the Conference. While recognizing the particularly significant role of the President in this process in line with the rules of procedure of the Conference, we would like to point out that agreeing on the programme of work is a task for us all, and thus requires the engagement of all participants. The Russian delegation has contributed in this regard through its proposal for the Conference, as a unifying theme, to draft an international convention on countering weapons of mass destruction terrorism. We hope that our views on the issue, which include the preparation by the Russian presidency of a draft programme of work, will provide a good basis for work in this important area, and we call on all delegations to engage in dialogue without delay to ensure the swift adoption of such a programme.

The main priority for the Russian delegation, and many others, remains the issue of the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The swift conclusion of the proposed treaty to prevent the deployment of weapons in outer space would not only prevent near-Earth space from being turned into a new arena for armed conflict, but would also ensure that the strategic situation remains predictable and, more broadly, strengthen international security. We are convinced that this will be in the interests of all States enjoying the benefits of peaceful use of space.

At the same time, we stand ready to engage in the most thorough work on all aspects of the broad international disarmament agenda; however, I will not go into detail on these today. The Russian Federation's main approaches to the issues of arms control,

disarmament and non-proliferation will be set out in the statement to the Conference on 28 February by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lavrov.

In conclusion, let me once again wish you, Madam President, and all participants every success, and underscore our commitment to constructive cooperation with you, the six Presidents of the 2018 session, and all delegations, in fulfilling our joint task of bringing the Conference on Disarmament back to substantive discussions.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his kind words and words of support and we of course all look forward to cooperating with him. Is there any other delegation that would like to take the floor? The representative of China has the floor.

Mr. Ji Haojun (China): (*spoke in Chinese*): Madam President, the Chinese delegation warmly congratulates you on your assumption of the presidency. We are confident that, under your wise leadership, the work of the Conference on Disarmament will proceed constructively. With regard to the issue of selecting coordinators for the subsidiary bodies, we hope that the consultation process will be open and transparent, avoiding conflicts of interest, in particular on the part of certain countries with their own (*spoke in English*) particular agenda (*spoke in Chinese*) on certain topics. While ensuring that the principle of equitable geographical distribution is fully implemented, we must avoid having too many coordinators from the same political and military alliance.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Ambassador Gennadiy Gatilov, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation; I am confident that his arrival will inject new vitality into the work of the Conference. The Chinese delegation will work together with the delegations of Russia and other countries to ensure progress in our work. As today is the fifth day of the Spring Festival in China, when according to Chinese tradition we welcome the (*spoke in English*) God of Wealth back to Earth, (*spoke in Chinese*) I take this opportunity to extend our wishes for all present to enjoy (*spoke in English*) a prosperous New Year, make enough money, and be healthy and happy for the whole year.

The President: I thank the representative of the Chinese delegation for his warm welcome and also for his words of support and we would equally like to wish him a good continuation of the New Year celebrations.

Is there any other delegation that would like to take the floor? The representative of Germany has the floor.

Mr. Biontino (Germany): Madam President, let me congratulate you upon the assumption of your office. We fully support your new endeavours here. At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Aryasinha for the tremendous work that he has done over the last month. We wish him all the best in his future endeavours, I believe that he left something very important here for us to deal with in the future. I would also like to welcome Ambassador Gatilov from the Russian Federation. You will find this environment a very open and friendly environment – not an easy environment for us, but open and friendly. And last but not least, since I was not here last week, I would like also to welcome Ambassador Wilczek from Poland.

Let me briefly give you our impression of where we stand right now. Despite all the misgivings that we all heard regarding the lack of progress in the Conference on Disarmament, there has been some progress. You will recall that, in 2014–2015, we only had a schedule of activities that was built upon in 2017 by the working group on the way ahead, marking what we believe is another step forward. Right now we have a formal decision which requires us to take stock of commonalities, to broaden agreements and consider effective measures for the future for all the important core issues of the Conference on Disarmament. From our perspective, this is an open-ended mandate.

We believe that we can go as far as consensus will carry us towards negotiations as we have been mandated by the General Assembly at the first special session devoted to disarmament. I believe, however, that we have to be practical and down to earth. What it requires here is a well-structured and well-prepared process. Since this process will continue throughout the year – and you will recall that it is still early in the year right now –

we have a great deal to do. Coordination among the Presidents of the session is of utmost importance to sustaining this momentum and to enhancing the dynamic processes that we have already seen this morning.

I hope that this year will end with a consensus report to the General Assembly on the work that has been done. For us, however, this is only a first step. We believe that the work that we are starting here right now must be continued over time to ensure continuity and additional progress, with a view, as we said at the outset, to moving towards negotiations as soon as possible.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative for his very supportive words and for drawing attention in this context to the importance of continuity between the Presidents. I hope that, with my opening words, I signalled that we are very much working in this direction.

I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Takamizawa (Japan): Allow me to extend my congratulations to you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation here in the Conference on Disarmament while strengthening cooperation among the six Presidents of the session. I also welcome your determination to operationalize the draft decision that we have made and I welcome the adoption of the draft decision: the Sri Lankan presidency has accomplished something particularly good in this decision, which is testimony to the hard work of all members to achieve this outcome and to get the Conference on Disarmament back to work.

I also feel encouraged to have heard last week that many countries had stated that this subsidiary body must add value to previous achievements, including those of the working group on the way ahead last year. In the light of these views, and bearing in mind various developments in other fields, I would like to suggest the following: first, how should we conduct substantive discussions in this subsidiary body? From the viewpoint of discussions in the working group on the way ahead about the need to add value, we should establish a more focused agenda for the Conference which reflects a higher level of maturity in an appropriate way and we should also conduct technical discussions. For this purpose, members familiar with each topic should be confirmed as coordinators at an early stage, as you just suggested, and intensive work should therefore begin immediately.

Second, regarding the structure of the subsidiary bodies, we should seek a way to have our meetings kept on record, to progress from one meeting to the next and to obtain substantial results. From this standpoint, we believe that informal meetings should not be the only structure that we consider. I would like to recall that rule 24 of the rules of procedure states that the subsidiary bodies shall meet formally if the Conference so decides.

Third, regarding the relationship between the subsidiary body and the draft programme of work, this subsidiary body is not intended just for the purpose of having its own meetings but for that of achieving the early adoption of a programme of work, through substantive discussions and broadening of the areas on which agreement can be reached. Accordingly, the submission of a draft comprehensive and balanced programme of work by the President of the Conference at an appropriate time would be welcomed.

For ourselves, we will be making every effort to get the Conference on Disarmament back to work.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador, for your words of support and your suggestions.

I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Dalcero (Brazil): Madam President, at the outset I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Please rest assured of my delegation's full support and cooperation in the discharge of your duties. I would like also to welcome the new Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation.

The Brazilian delegation remains ready to engage constructively and contribute to the efforts to advance the work of the Conference on Disarmament. We welcome the decision adopted by the Conference to establish five subsidiary bodies. We hope that the activities of these bodies, together with the informal consultations undertaken by the presidencies, will provide an essential contribution to the four core issues, namely, nuclear disarmament, prevention of an arms race in outer space, a fissile material treaty and negative security assurances, along with emerging and other issues relevant to the substantive work of the Conference, which will be considered in the fifth group.

Madam President, my delegation does expect that, under your guidance, we will be able collectively to define and approve the coordination, the methodology of work and the timetable of the meetings of the subsidiary bodies.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Brazil and assure you that it is our intent to move ahead swiftly but with your consent.

Is there any other delegation that would like to take the floor at this stage? I give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Bektiusuma (Indonesia): Madam President, on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Indonesia, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption as the President of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you every success in performing your responsibilities; you may count on my delegation's support for the accomplishment of your tenure. I would also like to take this opportunity to express Indonesia's appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Ambassador Aryasinha, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka, for his able stewardship in guiding our previous work. The adoption of the decision to establish subsidiary bodies last Friday is truly a reflection of the dedication and determination of Ambassador Aryasinha and his team to bring back substantive work in this Conference.

Madam President, allow me also to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, to extend a warm welcome to the new Permanent Representative of Russia: I believe that his experience and expertise will add positive value to this Conference.

While the Sri Lankan presidency has granted us a good basis to continue our substantive work in the Conference, we cannot set aside the fact that we still have important homework to do. There is an urgent need to finalize the establishment of the subsidiary bodies, in particular the appointment of its coordinators, work methods and proposed outcomes. Regarding the timetable, my delegation has the impression that most of the member States of the Conference on Disarmament would like to have an equal and balanced allocation of time for the deliberations of the subsidiary bodies. This notion surely constitutes a challenge, taking into consideration the packed schedule of activities on the disarmament agenda in Geneva and in the high-level segment to be held next week.

In the light of these considerations, my delegation proposes that we might request the secretariat to kindly provide us with the calendar of all disarmament-related activities scheduled to take place in Geneva in the year of 2018 so that we can better arrange the schedule of meetings for the subsidiary bodies. This arrangement is of particular importance for delegations such as that of Indonesia, which have very limited resources, so that we can organize our resources to contribute as much as we can to the work of the subsidiary bodies. This well-planned arrangement would also provide us with sufficient time to identify experts in our capitals and to prepare them for participation in the work of the subsidiary bodies. My delegation believes that the participations of qualified experts will make a substantial contribution to the deliberations in the subsidiary bodies, thus ensuring that we do not waste our time repeating political statements.

Let me conclude, Madam President, by reiterating that Indonesia is committed and stands ready to support your work in line with your presidency agenda and my delegation looks forward to accelerating the process for the establishment of the subsidiary bodies under the Swedish presidency.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Indonesia for the assurances of his commitment and for the homework that we all need to do, also reminding

us of the tight time schedule. As a matter of fact, you will already find that all the events that concur with our work here have been uploaded on our web page, but I understand that the secretariat is also willing to circulate this for your information.

I now give the floor to my dear predecessor, the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Aryasinha (Sri Lanka): Madam President and excellencies, colleagues, I do not want any time to be wasted talking, I want time to be spent working and so I will be very brief.

I have just taken the floor to welcome our distinguished colleague, the Ambassador of the Russian Federation. We look forward to working with you in the furthering of your mandate both in the Conference on Disarmament, and also in other bodies.

Madam President, I also want to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency and to assure you of Sri Lanka's full support. May I also assure you that, just as we have worked together within the group of six Presidents, we will continue that support and we will be behind you as you and other colleagues move forward.

As a final word, I would like to reflect on our work over the last month, simply to say that, in my view, we opened a small window. We must be aware, however, that windows close if not used and it is very important that there were delegations which gave last week's endeavour a chance and I believe that their confidence must be built upon. That was a compromise and in that compromise there are many parties who would want to see things happen and happen soon. So I believe that we should redouble our efforts. I am happy that the President is committed to making use of this momentum but we should still be very conscious that we must move rapidly to deal with the appointment of coordinators and the setting up of a schedule. We must also work around whatever difficulties that we may encounter at this present moment in managing meetings. I say all this because, if there is the will, I am sure there is a way.

I wish to thank all of you for the very kind words of support that you extended to my delegation both today and over the course of last month and Sri Lanka looks forwards to continuing its support within the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador, for these words of wisdom and I can assure you all that we fully concur with your view and thank you for this small window of opportunity that you have opened up for us all. Again I would like to underline our need now for a commonality of endeavours in order to move ahead.

Is there any other delegation that would like to take the floor at this stage? I see none, so with this let me conclude the business for today because there is work that has to be done.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will take place at 3 p.m. on Thursday, 22 February. This meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.